



Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy  
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery  
Jesus of Nazareth Episcopal Church (Iglesia Episcopal Jesús de Nazaret)  
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Thank you. I am so glad to be here with you.

*Muchas gracias. Estoy muy feliz estar aquí con ustedes.*

*Me perdonan, pero voy a dar este discurso en inglés. Sin embargo, hemos preparado copias de mi discurso en español para aquellos que lo quieran.*

As Father José said, my name is Stephanie Murphy and I represent this part of central Florida in the U.S. Congress.

I want to begin by thanking Father José for inviting me to speak. Father José: you do so much for this congregation, this community, and this country. I don't know when you sleep. But I do know that, every day, you express your love for God by showing your love for the men, women, and children that God created in His image, especially those who have endured difficult circumstances and need a helping hand to get back on their feet. So, thank you for demonstrating your faith through deeds. The world needs more people like you.

I met Father José for the first time earlier this year. He accompanied four new members of this congregation to Washington, DC—Emmanuel Ortiz-Nazario, his wife Cristalimar Torres-Rodriguez, and their two beautiful and *very* well-behaved children.

I invited Emmanuel to be my special guest at the President's annual State of the Union speech to Congress, and I was so happy that he accepted my invitation.

As you probably know, Emmanuel and his family moved from Bayamón, Puerto Rico to Orlando after Hurricane Maria devastated the island last September. I asked them to join me in our nation's capital for the President's speech because I wanted to shine a light on the challenges that American citizens from Puerto Rico have been facing since Hurricane Maria, whether they decided to remain on *la isla del encanto* or to relocate to Florida or other states.

I know that many of you also moved here from Puerto Rico, perhaps years ago, perhaps more recently because of the economic crisis on the island, or perhaps—like Emmanuel and his family—because of the damage and disruption caused by Hurricane Maria.

I also know that some of you are immigrants who were born in different countries throughout the Caribbean and Latin America.

This morning, I want to talk briefly about this theme of migration, about the process of moving from one place to another place, as so many of you have done. This is a physical journey, of course, but it is also an emotional journey. It requires courage and determination, because it can be difficult and even overwhelming.

Naturally, you miss the loved ones you left behind, just as you miss your culture and your customs and the comfortable routines you had become used to.

You may struggle to adapt to a new way of life, to a new language, and to new traditions. While the home you left might not have been perfect, it was still your *home*. The land of your parents and grandparents, and *their* parents and grandparents. The place where you spent your childhood and created countless memories, both happy and sad.

To leave your home can create a hole in your heart that you don't know how to fill. It can make you feel like you have lost an intangible but important piece of yourself. It can shake your sense of identity and your sense of self-worth.

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I empathize with your story of leaving home and trying to build a better life in a new home, because it is my family's story too. I confess that it was a story that I didn't tell for many years, because it felt too painful and too personal, but it is a story that now fills me with pride.

I am an immigrant and a refugee from Vietnam. My parents lived a comfortable middle-class life in that country. However, in the late 1970s, the Vietnam War ended and the communist government took power. My parents made the difficult but—in their mind—necessary decision to flee Vietnam.

My brother was eight years old at the time, and I was only a baby. My parents worried about our futures. They didn't want my brother and me to grow up under an oppressive government that did not respect human rights. They wanted us to live in a place where we would be safe, where we would have freedom, and where we would be treated with dignity—and they didn't think any of that was possible in Vietnam.

My parents were willing to sacrifice everything to give me and my brother the chance to have a better life.

It is hard to define exactly what love is, but I know this was an act of love.

And so we left Vietnam in a small boat in the dead of night along with several other families. My dad was the captain of the boat. Despite his skills, we almost didn't make it. Our boat ran out of fuel in the middle of the sea. Thanks to a higher power, and a little bit of luck, we were saved by

sailors from the U.S. Navy. They found our boat and gave us the fuel and supplies we needed to reach Malaysia.

In Malaysia, we were sent to a refugee camp for several months. Ultimately, the Lutheran Church sponsored our passage to the United States, where we settled in Virginia and became proud U.S. citizens. And now, years later, this immigrant and refugee is standing in front of you as the first Vietnamese American woman to serve in the United States Congress.

I want my family's story to give you hope. But I also want you to understand that, like all human stories, our migration story was not a fairy tale. Rather, it was filled with complexity and challenges.

Although my parents, my brother, and I were eternally grateful to be living in the United States, our life once we arrived in Virginia was not easy, especially for my parents. I know that your lives aren't easy either. I know that, despite your gratitude, you carry many burdens and face many trials.

In the case of my family, my father used to say that he arrived in this country with nothing but his two bare hands. We had very little money and my parents didn't speak English. We lived in a part of America where there were almost no other Vietnamese families, so my parents didn't really have a community of people who they could easily talk to and who could understand what they had experienced. Although they never spoke about it, because that was not their nature, my parents must have felt very isolated and alone.

But, despite all the problems and the pain associated with migration, you push and you persevere because you are motivated by the desire to make a better life for yourself and your family. You fight, and you work hard, and you never give up.

You find strength inside yourself that you never knew existed.

You find strength in your faith and in your friends, both old and new.

You find strength in the kindness of strangers—people like Father José whose mission in life is to help others help themselves.

And, hopefully, you receive a warm welcome from your new community and strong support from your new government.

I will close with this thought. I lost my father in 2002, but every day I try to live my life in a way that I think would make him proud. Now that I am a Member of Congress, I believe it is my moral obligation—and the best way to honor my father's memory—to support policies that help hard-working families who have migration stories of their own. Families like yours. You have taken great risks and shown great courage. I understand that. I respect that. And I will always honor that.

Please know that I will work hard every day to make central Florida a safer, more inclusive, and more prosperous place for every member of this community, whether they have lived here for generations or arrived recently.

May God bless you and your families, may He always be with Puerto Rico and its people, and may He continue to bestow his grace and love upon our great nation.

Thank you *y muchas gracias*.